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**Children & Family Services  
Committee**

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**SB 5311**

**Brief Description:** Creating an autism task force.

**Sponsors:** Senators Rasmussen, Jacobsen, McAuliffe, Mulliken, Stevens, Roach, Shin, Kohl-Welles and Spanel.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Creates the Caring for Washington Children with Autism Task Force to study and make recommendations to the Legislature regarding the growing incidence of autism and ways to improve the delivery and coordination of autism services in the state.

**Hearing Date:** March 28, 2005.

**Staff:** Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

**Background:**

Autism is a neurologically based developmental disability that impacts the normal development of the brain in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Autism affects an estimated one in 250 births, resulting in as many as 1.5 million Americans with autism. The incidence of autism is estimated to be growing at a rate of 10 to 17 percent each year.

Research into the neurobiological, genetic, and environmental bases of autism is ongoing. Currently, there is no known single cause of the disorder. Autism can be detected as early as 18 months of age, which offers the opportunity for intervention during the period when the brain is most plastic. Such early intervention can result in a significant increase in IQ and language ability and a decrease in support services needed later in life.

Autism is a disorder that may qualify an individual for services through the Division of Development Disabilities (DDD) in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The DDD provides or purchases a broad range of residential, therapeutic, employment, family support, and nursing services for eligible persons and their families both in institutions and in the community. Approximately 1,300 individuals whose primary diagnosis is autism are served by the DDD, making up three percent of the total number of individuals who have been determined to be eligible for services through the DDD.

**Summary of Bill:**

The Caring for Washington Children with Autism Task Force (Task Force) is created to study and make recommendations to the Legislature regarding the growing incidence of autism and ways to improve the delivery and coordination of autism services in the state.

The Task Force is to consist of 14 members, as follows:

- four members of the Legislature, including two members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate, one of the majority party and one of the minority party, and two members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, including one of the majority party and one of the minority party; and
- 10 additional members appointed by the Governor, including at least the following:
  - two parents of children with autism; and
  - representatives of the Autism Center at the University of Washington, the Department of Health (DOH), the DSHS, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), a local school district, and an educational service district.

The Task Force is required to:

- review the available literature and consult with experts to gain an understanding of the causes of autism and its incidence in Washington;
- assess the availability of services currently provided for early screening, diagnosis, and treatment of autism;
- assess the availability of services to assist families of individuals with autism;
- review the effectiveness of programs and services provided to individuals with autism and their families;
- review other issues and concerns that the Task Force believes would be helpful in arriving at sound policy recommendations; and
- complete its review and submit its recommendations to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature and the Governor by December 1, 2006.

The DOH is required to be the lead agency in providing staff needed for the performance of the work of the Task Force. The DOH may seek additional staff assistance from the OSPI and the committee staff of the Legislature.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.